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POLICY ISSUES: GOVERNANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

Assessment of the functioning of the secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme

Note by the Executive Director

1. The Executive Director has the honour to transmit herewith the report on the assessment of the functioning of the secretariat prepared by the Committee of Permanent Representatives in accordance with Governing Council decision 19/29 B.

2. The report is reproduced as it was received by the Governing Council secretariat, without formal editing.

* UNEP/GC.20/1.

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9 November, 1998

19/29 B. Assessment of the functioning of the secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme.

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I. Introduction

1. The Governing Council decision 19/29 B requested the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) to make an assessment of the functioning of the secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The term secretariat in this report is understood as being UNEP and the parts/elements of UNON which are serving and have direct impact on the work and the function of UNEP.

2. Decision 19/29 B should be seen as a part of the reform process in UNEP focusing mainly on the working methods of the secretariat. Closely related to this process, but at the same time clearly distinguished from it, is the structural reform dealt with in earlier discussions and conclusions on governance.

3. CPR, at its 63rd meeting held on 15 July 1998 decided to establish a working group which was chaired by Mr. S. Mehli, Norway, with Mr. El Kouny, Egypt, as rapporteur. The working g roup had three core members from each regional group and met six times. The agreed Terms of Reference are attached as annex 1.

4. During the 1996-67 biennium, UNEP faced a substantial reduction in the contributions to the Environment Fund compared to previous years. The reason was mainly dissatisfaction with management and the performance of the secretariat. The decline in contributions had serious implications for the organization leading to severe reductions in staff and adjustments to the programme. This led UNEP into a protracted process of restructuring. The CPR also questioned the practice of hiring consultants, filling of posts, a top-heaviness and lack of proper delegation of responsibilities in the top management, as well as a complicated and fragmented internal organizational structure. At the same time, the top management were seen to be attending too many functions outside Nairobi, especially at this critical juncture of the organization.

5. The CPR regularly expressed concern to UNEP about the lack of transparency of the UNEP-secretariat. A lack of trust and confidence in the CPR led to restrictive instructions from the last Executive Director to UNEP staff not to talk to any diplomat without proper authorization. This situation undermined proper communication between the CPR and the secretariat, and weakened the ability of the CPR to provide proper and timely advice to capitals.

6. The CPR felt that the recommendations on the operations of the secretariat submitted by the Board of Auditors in their biennial reports should be dealt with promptly.

7. UNEP experienced difficulties in living up to its expectations on the UNCED approved mandate and coordination responsibilities and to the UN reform process. A team from the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), visiting Nairobi in September 1996, conducted a review of UNEP and UNON. The recommendations of the OIOS report suggested considerable room for improvement and streamlining. This together with the observations made by the CPR itself, result in the Governing Council decision 19/29 B.

II. Ongoing reform and restructuring activities

8. In paragraphs 123 and 124 of the Programme for the further Implementation of Agenda 21, adopted by the Special Session of the General Assembly in June 1997, it was agreed that the role of UNEP should be revitalized taking into account its catalytic responsibilities, and in conformity with the Nairobi Declaration, by making UNEP the leading environment authority that sets the global environmental agenda. Such a revitalized UNEP should focus on environmental issues, taking into account the developing agenda and be supported by adequate, stable and predictable funding. Special areas to be strengthened were the development of coherent interlinkages among relevant environmental conventions and effective implementation of those conventions.

9. The August 1998 OIOS-report and the Board of Auditors report for the 1996-97 biennium, put forward a number of recommendations which should be implemented without delay.

10. The Executive Director introduced a draft for a new organizational structure of the secretariat and UNON during the Fifth Special Session of the GC in May 1998 with a view to focusing the programme and clearly identifying priority areas. It is expected that the new structure will lead to greater coordination and will clarify defined areas of responsibility and authority for the different units.

11. At the same session, the Executive Director announced the transfer of the Program Support Services of UNEP to UNON. Day to day authority would be delegated using clear lines of responsibility, clarifying objectives, performance standards and appropriate oversight mechanisms.

12. The UN Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements proposed that the United Nations Office at Nairobi be strengthened and provided with sufficient resources from the regular UN-budget. UNEP, Habitat and UNON should time being continue to be directed by one person. Recommendations were also made on unifying the administrations of UNEP, Habitat and UNON to the fullest extent feasible, on establishing common institutions for support and services and to ensure that planning and implementation of programmes were tightly linked. The Taskforce gave additional recommendations on regional offices, interlinkages and support from UNEP to environmental and environmental-related conventions.

Recommendation: The CPR recommends that UNEP continues with the ongoing process of strengthening, restructuring and revitalization of the secretariat, based on existing reports from external institutions, internal processes and recommendations in the taskforce report.

III. The secretariat. Assessment of management and relationships

III.1. UNEP Structure and practices

13. The newly proposed functional structure is mainly based on the organizational draft presented to the GC Special Session in May 1998 but the final structure has not yet been decided. The budget proposal for the next biennium should be designed according to the priorities of the new programme.

In the new structure it will be important to address coordination between separate divisions covering different elements of the same sector, for example water. Towards the end, the establishment of separate mechanisms should be considered, e.g. the appointment of task managers. Proper attention should be given to the flow of information between the separate divisions and their activities in the regions.

Recommendation: The CPR endorses the ongoing reform process in UNEP and recommends that it pays special attention to the coordination of sectoral issues, both in headquarters and in the regional offices, establishes appropriate control functions for the allocation and use of funds and provide timely information thereon to governments.

III.2. UNON.Administrative matters

14. UNON as a common service provider for UNEP and UNCHS was established in January 1996 to promote savings and increase efficiency in administration of the two institutions. It rapidly became evident that the initial process lacked the required infrastructure and necessary involvement of the governing bodies of the client institutions.

15. UNEP, UNCHS and UNON, having been organized under a common head, need to work closely together but are presently not yet in a position to do so. Difficulties include incompatibility of computer equipment, the modalities of UNON's formation, financing and the subsequent negative perception of the client organizations. Difficulties have also been encountered because there is an apparent lack of a clearly defined structure and lines of responsibility to govern the relationships between UNON, UNEP and Habitat. The decision-making process also appears to be unnecessarily low.

Recommendation: There is a need to define, in consultation with the CPR as requested by the GC, the roles and tasks of UNON. The respective governing bodies should assist in clarifying these roles and tasks and the structure of UNON and clearly define areas of administrative responsibility and authority between UNON and the client institutions.

16. UNON must address the issue of human resource management, focusing among other matters on perennial and permanent contracts and the transparency and efficiency of the recruitment process. The current problems of attracting high-level personnel needs to be addressed urgently. Similarly, a broadening of the recruitment base through JPOs, secondments and trainees should be considered. This has to be combined with a realistic assessment of the post-adjustment allowances in Nairobi.

17. UNON is presently partly financed through the UN regular budget but largely through external contributions, mainly UNEP. In line with the UN Offices at Vienna and Geneva, contributions from the UN Regular budget to UNON should be enhanced. UNON would then be in a position to offer services to other UN agencies in Nairobi.

18. The establishment of UNON has apparently resulted in savings for UNEP and UNCHS. Transfer of additional functions from the two institutions to UNON is under consideration. This should lead to further savings.

19. Increased reliance on the services of UNON, will require the establishment of a system to ensure quality control and value-for-money. A benchmark system for all administrative services by UNON, such as recently established for UNOV, would provide for transparency and accountability.

Recommendation: The CPR recommends that the contribution of the UN regular budget to UNON be further enhanced. To further increase savings and efficiency the broadening of UNONs client base should be considered. The comprehensive use by other UN entities and permanent missions of UNEP/UNON's Mercure communications system should be realized.

III.3. Relationships.Secretariat/CPR/Governments

20. The relationship between the secretariat and the governments is presented in decision 19/32. This established the High-level Committee of Ministers and Officials (HLCOMO) as a subsidiary organ of the Governing Council and similarly clarified the role and the mandate of the CPR.

21. The CPR takes note of the improvements over the past year on the part of the secretariat with respect to the increased transparency and methods of communication with Permanent Missions and an appropriate level of representation at all meetings.

22. Since GC 19, decisions have concentrated more on giving substantive and clear guidance to the secretariat. This has benefited the work of both the CPR and the secretariat and has resulted in fewer and more significant decisions, avoiding, to some extent, discussions and decisions on procedural issues.

23. However, there is still room for improvement. Dialogue between the secretariat and governments can be further streamlined, e.g., a concerted approach should be followed on financial assistance instead of ad hoc requests from divisions. The need for the secretariat to have a close contact and good channels of communication with the delegations in Nairobi and with capitals should be further improved. This could be achieved through timely distribution of agendas and other information for CPRs and other meetings. UNEP should endeavour to place all documents for major meetings on the Internet in good time.

Recommendation: While acknowledging the improved working relations with the secretariat, the CPR recommends that channels of communication be further improved and document distribution more effectively implemented.

III.4. Relationships.Regional offices/Convention secretariats.

24. Although the six regional offices of UNEP have slightly different functions, they basically liaise for UNEP HQ in their regions and address regional environmental priorities. They also have responsibility to report back on environmental issues in their regions. Furthermore, the regional offices should be proactive, arrange meetings for their constituencies, initiate specific projects and establish good working relations with the countries in their region. However, resources allocated for the regional offices from the UNEP HQ do not always allow for substantial follow-up activities and additional resources are often required by the regions.

Contact between UNEP HQ and the regional offices should be improved so as to have proper information flows and the involvement of regional offices in the planning of activities of UNEP in their regions.

25. Relations between the regional offices and governments could be further enhanced by arranging meetings between the regional directors and the respective regional groups in Nairobi, while the directors are participating in meetings.

26. The importance of a close follow up and support to the relevant convention secretariats by UNEP, particularly administrative, financial and personnel matters, has to be strongly underlined. The CPR concurs with the report from the UN Special Session in June 1997 concerning institutional arrangements between convention secretariats and UNEP. In this regard, both UNEP and convention secretariats should avoid unnecessary duplication and clearly identify complementary services and functions.

Recommendation: The CPR recommends that efforts to strengthen the regional offices be continued. These should include the necessary financial and personnel resources to meet the increased responsibilities. The CPR further recommends that appropriate support and coordination be provided by UNEP to the convention secretariats as mandated by UNGASS.

Annex 1

19/29 B. Assessment of the functioning of the secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme

Terms of Reference for the Working Group

1. The Committee of Permanent Representatives to UNEP at its 63rd meeting held on 15 July 1998 decided to establish a working group under the CPR to make an assessment of the functioning of the secretariat of the United Nation Environment Programme. The final report of the working group should contain an introductory description on the developments leading to the adoption on decision 19/29 B, by the Governing Council.

2. The working group is further to take into account, the present evolving situation with a new Executive Director of UNEP and his ongoing activities and actions for the reform and restructuring of the organization. The Working Group is to work closely with the secretariat in conducting the study.

3. The working group should also take into account any relevant report, in particular reports from the OIOS, the Executive Director and the United Nations Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements, focusing on the following issues:

   - relationship between the secretariat and the CPR and the governments
   - administrative structure and practices of the secretariat of UNEP and of UNON including financial issues and personnel matters with special reference to consultations with the CPR on decisions to be made
   - relations between the secretariat of UNEP, the regional offices and the related secretariats of conventions

4. Based on available reports and on its discussions, the working group is to prepare an assessment of the functioning of the secretariat and to suggest specific recommendations as to how to make the secretariat more efficient, effective and transparent.

5. The working group should conclude its business by 31 October 1998.

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FOLLOW-UP OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTIONS

Issues arising from the resolutions of the General Assembly at its fifty-second and fifty-third sessions and nineteenth special session, specifically calling for action by the United Nations Environment Programme.

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present report provides information on issues arising from the resolutions of the nineteenth special session and fifty-second regular session of the General Assembly, which are of relevance to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). In areas where follow-up action to the resolution has not been indicated, this is prc·ided in the reports of the Executive Director under the relevant topics.

Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to take note of the Executive Director's report and the actions indicated therein.

* UNEP/GC.20/1.

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I. ISSUES ARISING FROM THE RESOLUTIONS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AT ITS NINETEENTH SPECIAL SESSION, SPECIFICALLY CALLING FOR ACTION BY THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

1. The General Assembly convened its nineteenth special session, for the purpose of the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21, from 23 to 28 June 1997. The Assembly, in its resolution S-19/2 of 28 June 1997, entitled "Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21", adopted the Programme annexed to the resolution. In accordance with Governing Council decision 19/2 of 7 February 1997 and General Assembly resolution 51/181 of 16 December 1996, presented the Nairobi Declaration on the Role and Mandate of UNEP (Governing Council 19/1 annex) to the Assembly at the session, and submitted inputs and documents on, inter alia, UNEP's implementation of Agenda 21 and the Governing Council's contribution to the Special Session.

2. In section IV of the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, the Assembly considering the role of relevant organizations and institutions of the United Nations system, reconfirmed that UNEP's role as the principal United Nations body in the field of the environment should be further enhanced. Taking into account UNEP's catalytic role, and in conformity with Agenda 21 and the Nairobi Declaration, the Assembly stated that UNEP "is to be the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system, and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment". In addition, the Assembly took note of Governing Council decision 19/32, concerning governance, and underlined that the revitalized UNEP should be supported by adequate, stable and predictable funding.

3. The Assembly also recommended that UNEP's role in the further development of international environmental law should be strengthened, including the development of coherent interlinkages among relevant environmental conventions in cooperation with their respective conferences of the parties or governing bodies. It stated that, in performing its functions related to the conventions signed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development or as a result of it, and other relevant conventions, UNEP should strive to promote the effective implementation of those conventions in a manner consistent with the provisions of the conventions and the decisions of the conferences of the parties. The Assembly further noted that at "the international and national levels there is a need for, inter alia, better scientific assessment of ecological linkages between the conventions; identification of programmes that have multiple benefits; and enhanced public awareness-raising with respect to the conventions". The Assembly specified that such tasks should be undertaken by UNEP in accordance with the relevant decisions of the Governing Council and in full cooperation with the conferences of the parties to and governing bodies of relevant conventions.

4. The General Assembly drew attention to the relationship between UNEP and the Commission on Sustainable Development recommending that UNEP should continue to provide effective support to the Commission, inter alia, in the form of scientific, technical and policy information and analysis of and advice on global environmental issues. Conversely, the Commission, while

conducting a high-level policy debate aimed at consensus-building on sustainable development, should continue to complement and provide interlinkages to the work of other United Nations agencies and bodies acting in the field of sustainable development. The Commission should promote policies that integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, providing for integrated consideration of linkages among sectors and between sectoral and cross-sectoral aspects of Agenda 21. Based on the 1993-1997 experience, the Commission, under the guidance of the Economic and Social Council, was encouraged to establish closer interaction with UNEP, which in turn was invited to take full account of the results of the Commission's policy deliberations and integrate them in its work programmes and activities.

5. Although there was a general understanding among Member States that individual United Nations agencies and programmes would not be mentioned in section III of the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, on areas requiring urgent action, several paragraphs specifically underline UNEP's role, in particular with regard to: trade and environment, negotiations on international legally binding instruments on prior informed consent (PIC) and persistent organic pollutants (POPs), cooperation among the implementing agencies of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), cooperation for the creation of centres for technology transfer, and cooperation with the Commission on Sustainable Development on the implementation and application of the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development.

6. In its consideration of the integration of economic, social and environmental issues, the General Assembly, inter alia, addressed changing consumption and production patterns (under which several recommended actions are being undertaken by UNEP), and ways of making trade and environment mutually supportive. In this regard, the Assembly stated that cooperation and coordination between the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the World Trade Organization (WTO), UNEP and other relevant institutions should be strengthened on various issues, including:

(a) The role of positive measures in multilateral environmental agreements as part of a package of measures including, in certain cases, trade measures;

(b) The special conditions and needs of small and medium-sized enterprises in the trade and environment interface; and

(c) Trade-and-environment issues at the regional and subregional levels, including within the context of regional economic and trade as well as environmental agreements.

7. In its consideration of sectoral issues, the General Assembly attached considerable importance to freshwater and oceans and seas. The Assembly, inter alia, stressed the urgent need to strengthen the capability of Governments and international institutions to collect and manage information, including scientific, social and environmental data, in order to facilitate the integrated assessment and management of water resources, and foster regional and international cooperation for information dissemination and exchange, through cooperative approaches among United Nations institutions,

including UNEP and centres for environmental excellence. With regard to oceans and seas, the Assembly emphasized the need to improve the quality and quantity of scientific data as a basis for effective decisions related to the protection of the marine environment and the conservation and management of marine living resources.

8. In its consideration of toxic chemicals, hazardous wastes, biological diversity, and desertification and drought, the General Assembly encouraged the development of efforts already undertaken in those areas. The Assembly also recommended that the Governing Council decisions 19/13 A to D concerning the sound management of chemicals should be implemented in accordance with the agreed timetables for negotiations on the conventions relating to prior informed consent (PIC) and persistent organic pollutants (POPs). With regard to biodiversity, the Assembly, inter alia, recommended the rapid completion of the biosafety protocol under the Convention on Biological Diversity, on the understanding that the UNEP International Technical Guidelines for Safety in Biotechnology may be used as an interim mechanism during its development, and to complement it after its conclusion, including the recommendations on capacity-building related to biosafety.

9. With regard to sustainable tourism, the General Assembly requested the Commission on Sustainable Development to develop an action-oriented international programme of work in cooperation with a number of international bodies, including UNEP. On the issue of energy, the Assembly, inter alia, encouraged the better coordination on the issue within the United Nations system.

10. With regard to financial resources and mechanisms, the General Assembly, inter alia, stated that the implementing agencies of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), - the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNEP and the World Bank - should strengthen, as appropriate and in accordance with their respective mandates, their cooperation at all levels, including the field level.

11. With regard to the transfer of environmentally sound technologies, the General Assembly stated that the creation of centres for the transfer of technology at various levels, including the regional level, could greatly contribute to the objective of transfer of environmentally sound technologies to developing countries. Existing United Nations bodies, including UNEP, were encouraged to cooperate in efforts to facilitate this task. The further exploration and enhancement of the potential of global electronic information and telecommunication networks, to enable countries to choose among available technological options, was also recommended. The Assembly further recommended that increased efforts be made to strengthen scientific evidence related to the environment and sustainable development, that it be accessible to developing countries, and that increased efforts be made to build scientific and technological capacity in those countries.

12. A report entitled "Implications of the outcome of the special session of the General Assembly for the future work of the United Nations Environment Programme" (UNEP/HLC/2/INF/3 and Corr.1) was presented to the UNEP High-Level Committee of Ministers and Officials at its second meeting, held from 2 to 4 March 1998, under the agenda item "UNEP reform in the context of United Nations reform". Furthermore, the Governing Council at its fifth special

session, held from 20 to 22 May 1998, reviewed the results and decisions of the special session of the General Assembly and the conclusions of the High-Level Committee of Ministers and Officials at its second meeting. As a result, the Governing Council, recalling in particular, paragraphs 119 and 122-124 of the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 (on international institutional arrangements), adopted decision SS.V/2, on the revitalization, reform and strengthening of UNEP. The next comprehensive review of Agenda 21 by the General Assembly will be in the year 2002.

II. ISSUES ARISING FROM THE RESOLUTIONS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AT ITS FIFTY-SECOND SESSION, SPECIFICALLY CALLING FOR ACTION BY THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

13. At its fifty-second session, the General Assembly, in its decision 52/441 of 18 December 1997, took note of the report of the Governing Council of UNEP on the work of its nineteenth session.

14. By its decision 52/445 of 18 December 1997, entitled "Progress in the implementation of conventions relating to sustainable development", the General Assembly decided to continue to review progress made in implementing the conventions signed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development or established as a result of the Conference, as well as other conventions related to sustainable development, bearing in mind section IV.A of the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21. Pursuant to the request of the Assembly, UNEP, in consultation with the Department for Economic and Social Affairs and the secretariats of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification prepared, as requested, a report for the Secretary-General on ways and means of undertaking this review, which was submitted to the Assembly at its fifty-third session (see paragraph 29 below).

15. In its resolution 52/182 of 18 December 1997, entitled "International trade and development", the General Assembly emphasized the need for a balanced and integrated approach to environment, trade and development. The Assembly encouraged the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) to continue its work on trade, environment and development, by examining trade and environmental issues from a development perspective in cooperation with relevant bodies, including, inter alia, UNEP. The Secretary-General was requested, in collaboration with the secretariat of UNCTAD to report orally to the Assembly at its fifty-third session on implementation of the resolution. UNEP has strengthened its efforts to build closer links between trade and environmental policies, and is undertaking several initiatives in cooperation with, inter alia, UNCTAD, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the World Bank.

16. By its resolution 52/184 of 18 December 1997, entitled "Science and technology for development", the General Assembly stressed the need to strengthen United Nations' role in the field of science and technology, particularly through effective policy guidance and better coordination, including, international cooperation in inter alia, providing an environment conducive to the development of new environmentally sound technologies. The Assembly called upon the organizations, funds and programmes of the United Nations to continue to work in a coordinated and expeditious manner to develop a catalogue to enable effective technology choice, by developing countries, of state-of-the-art technologies. The Assembly reiterated its

affirmation, as set forth in the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 (see para. 11 above), that the creation of centres for the transfer of technology at various levels, including the regional level, could greatly contribute to achieving the objective of transfer of environmentally sound technologies to developing countries, and that, for that purpose, existing United Nations bodies and mechanisms, including, inter alia, UNEP, should cooperate. The Secretary-General was requested to submit to the Assembly at its fifty-fourth session a report on progress made in implementation of the resolution.

17. By its resolution 52/198 of 18 December 1997 entitled "Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa", the General Assembly called upon all countries not parties to the Convention to take appropriate action for its ratification, acceptance, or approval or accession thereto. The Assembly, recognizing the support provided during the interim phase of the Convention by, inter alia, the United Nations system, approved the institutional linkage between the Convention secretariat and the United Nations, noted that the Conference of the Parties had decided to accept the offer of the Government of Germany to host the Convention secretariat at Bonn and welcomed the offer of the Government of Senegal to host the second session of the Conference of the Parties in Dakar from 30 November to 11 December 1998. The Assembly stressed the necessity to advance the full implementation of the Convention and called upon the international community, including the United Nations system to support the efforts of affected developing countries in these processes. The Secretary-General was requested to bring the resolution to the attention of, inter alia, the relevant funds and programmes of the United Nations system. Pursuant to the request of the Assembly he submitted a report (A/53/516) to the fifty-third session on the implementation of the resolution. UNEP is, inter alia, working to strengthen its relationship to the work programmes of the Convention to Combat Desertification based on considerations of coordination and synergy and, through its mandate in GEF, is undertaking initiatives to facilitate regional cooperation to achieve the Convention's objectives.

18. By its resolution 52/199 of 18 December 1997, entitled "Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind", the General Assembly noted with satisfaction that most States and one regional economic integration organization have ratified or acceded to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and looked forward to the continued efforts of the Conference of the Parties and its subsidiary bodies in addressing climate change.

19. In its resolution 52/200 of 18 December 1997, entitled "International cooperation to reduce the impact of the El Niño phenomenon", the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to facilitate, within the framework of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, an internationally concerted and comprehensive strategy towards the integration of the prevention, mitigation and rehabilitation of the damages caused by El Niño. The Assembly called upon the United Nations system, including UNEP, within the framework of the Decade, to contribute to a comprehensive approach and study of El Niño and intensify cooperation with the regions affected. Pursuant to the request of the Assembly, the Secretary-General submitted to the fifty-third session a report (A/53/487) on the resolution's

implementation, within discussions on the implementation of the Decade, under the agenda item "Environment and sustainable development", which included proposals on how to integrate the prevention, mitigation and rehabilitation of the impacts of the El Niño phenomenon into the development of the disaster reduction strategy for the twenty-first century. UNEP contributed to the report.

20. In its resolution 52/201 of 18 December 1997, entitled "Convention on Biological Diversity", the General Assembly welcomed the results of the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, held at Buenos Aires from 4 to 15 November 1996, and reaffirmed the need to take concrete action to fulfil the three objectives of the Convention. The Assembly encouraged those States that have not yet ratified the Convention to do so as soon as possible. The Assembly also noted the clarification of administrative arrangements regarding the respective roles of UNEP and the secretariat of the Convention in respect of personnel and financial matters, as detailed in the Administrative Arrangements between UNEP and the Convention secretariat signed on 30 June 1997. The Executive Secretary of the Convention was invited to report on the results of future meetings of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to the Assembly.

21. By its resolution 52/202 of 18 December 1997, entitled "Implementation of the outcome of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States", the General Assembly called upon the United Nations system to take necessary actions for effective follow-up to the Barbados Programme of Action, including the modalities adopted by the Global Conference for the full and comprehensive review of the programme. The Assembly invited UNEP, the Commission on Sustainable Development and other relevant United Nations bodies, and the World Tourism Organization to urgently develop strategies with existing national, regional and subregional tourism organisations in small island developing States on the development of sustainable tourism. Pursuant to the Assembly's request, the Secretary-General presented a report to the fifty-third session, entitled "Plans and projects for the sustainable development of small island states implemented, under implementation or envisaged for the period 1999-2003 by bilateral donors, United Nations organizations and regional and non-United Nations international organizations" (A/53/358). UNEP submitted details of its relevant projects on small island developing States for the report.

22. In its resolution 52/21 of 25 November 1997 entitled "Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal", the General Assembly noted with satisfaction the increasing number of joint endeavours of the International Olympic Committee and the United Nations system, including, inter alia, in the field of protection of the environment, in which UNEP participated.

23. In its resolution 52/55 of 10 December 1997, entitled "Effects of atomic radiation", the Assembly requested UNEP to continue providing support for the effective conduct of the work of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) and for the dissemination of its findings to the Assembly, the scientific community and the public.

24. In its resolution 52/214 of 22 December 1997, entitled "Pattern of conferences", the General Assembly, inter alia, encouraged all the subsidiary bodies of the Governing Council of UNEP and the Commission on Human Settlements and other United Nations bodies to hold their meetings at the United Nations Office at Nairobi to the extent possible. Pursuant to the request of the Assembly, the Secretary-General submitted a report to the fifty-third session (A/AC.172/1998/3), through the Committee on Conferences, on the actions taken to assist the aforementioned bodies in improving this situation.

III. ISSUES ARISING FROM THE RESOLUTIONS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AT ITS FIFTY-THIRD SESSION, SPECIFICALLY CALLING FOR ACTION BY THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

25. By its resolution 53/187 of 15 December 1998, entitled, "Report of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme", the General Assembly welcomed the report of the Governing Council on its fifth special session and the decisions contained therein. The Assembly recognized, in particular, decision SS.V/2 on the revitalization, reform and strengthening of UNEP, including the areas of concentration of the activities as proposed by the Executive Director in keeping with the spirit of the Nairobi Declaration, as well as other UNEP priority areas as established by the Governing Council at its nineteenth session.

26. In the same resolution, the Assembly welcomed the adoption by the Conference of the Plenipotentiaries, at Rotterdam on 10 September 1998, of the Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade and took note of the fact that the functions of the secretariat of the Convention are jointly performed by the Food and Agriculture Organization and UNEP as an interim arrangement pending the final decision to be taken by the parties to the Convention on the location of the secretariat. The Assembly further welcomed the holding of the first session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for an internationally legally binding instrument for implementing international action on certain persistent organic pollutants (POPs) which took place in Montreal in June 1998, and welcomed the positive role played by UNEP in the field of environmental management of chemicals and especially the efforts undertaken by UNEP as the secretariat for the negotiations on a convention on POPs.

27. Furthermore, the Assembly emphasized that UNEP has been and must continue to be the principal United Nations body in the field of the environment and that its role is to be the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the UN system and that serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment. The Assembly also welcomed Governing Council decision SS.V/6, as well as the decisions of the April 1998 meeting of the Assembly of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the October 1998 GEF Council meeting regarding UNEP's role in GEF, and welcomed further the collaboration with GEF on freshwater resources, as in the global international water assessment and on activities aimed at combating land degradation as they relate to the GEF focal areas.

28. The Assembly encouraged the Executive Director to continue with the ongoing reform of UNEP, recognized, as stated in the Nairobi Declaration, that in order to operationalise its mandate, a revitalised UNEP needs adequate, stable and predictable financial resources, and, in this regard, recognized the interrelationship between excellence, relevance and cost-effectiveness in programme delivery, confidence in the organization and a consequent increase in the ability of UNEP to attract funding. The Assembly further encouraged the Executive Director to intensify his efforts to mobilise additional financial resources from other donor sources, as appropriate, in order to support the implementation of the priority areas of UNEP in line with the Nairobi Declaration and subject to the agreement of the Governing Council.

29. By its resolution 53/186 of 15 December 1998, entitled "International institutional arrangements related to environment and development", the General Assembly, recalling the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, in particular part IV thereof, entitled "International institutional arrangements", and its decision 52/445 of 18 December 1997, on progress in the implementation of conventions relating to sustainable development, took note of the report of the Secretary-General on ways and means of undertaking the review of progress made in implementing conventions related to sustainable development (A/53/477). This report was prepared by UNEP, at the request of the Secretary-General, in consultation with the Department for Economic and Social Affairs and the secretariats of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. The Assembly further emphasized that policy decisions under the conventions are undertaken by their respective Conference of Parties, which are autonomous governing bodies. Noting that various conventions related to environment and sustainable development are at different stages of implementation, the Assembly recognized its role in fostering progress in the implementation of those conventions and of the commitments contained therein. The Assembly also reaffirmed the need, as stipulated in part IV of the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, for greater coherence in various intergovernmental organizations and processes through better policy coordination at the intergovernmental level, as well as for continued and more concerted efforts to enhance collaboration among the secretariats of relevant decision-making bodies.

30. In the operative part of the resolution, the Assembly encouraged the Conferences of the Parties to, and the permanent secretariats of, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification to examine appropriate opportunities and measures to strengthen their complementarities and better scientific assessment of ecological linkages between the three conventions. The Assembly further requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report, for submission to the Assembly at its fifty-fourth session, identifying actions undertaken to implement part IV.A, in particular paragraph 119, of the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, as well as the areas requiring further consideration and work, taking into account the roles of relevant organizations and institutions of the United Nations system, as stated in part IV of the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21.

31. By its resolution 53/188 of 15 December 1998, entitled "Implementation of and follow-up to the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly", the General Assembly stressed the need to accelerate the full implementation of Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, and recognized that the Commission on Sustainable Development will continue to provide the central forum for reviewing progress and for urging further implementation, and for conducting a high-level policy debate aimed at consensus-building on sustainable development, and for catalysing action and long-term commitment on sustainable development. The Assembly called on the Commission to continue to, inter alia, complement and provide interlinkages to the work of other United Nations organs, organizations and bodies active in the field of sustainable development. The Assembly also emphasized that to achieve more substantive results by the next review of the implementation of Agenda 21 in 2002 will require concerted efforts at all levels. The Assembly underscored the importance of continued active and collaborative involvement of all relevant parts of the United Nations system, and requested the Secretary-General, in close collaboration with all relevant parts of the United Nations system taking into account the outcome of the deliberations in the Commission on Sustainable Development, to submit to future sessions of the Assembly, through the Economic and Social Council, an analytical report on the measures taken within the United Nations system to accelerate implementation of Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, including the identification of constraints and recommendations on how to address those constraints. Stressing the importance of high-quality preparations for the forthcoming ten-year review of Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit it at its fifty-fifth session a report on possible ways and means of ensuring effective preparations for this review.

32. In its resolution 53/185 of 15 December 1998, entitled "International cooperation to reduce the impact of the El Niño phenomenon", the General Assembly stressed that any credible strategy for the reduction of the natural disaster effects of future El Niño occurrences must be based on effective dialogue and cooperation between the scientific and technological areas of the United Nations system and its operational responsibilities in the fields of disaster management, humanitarian assistance, sustainable development, technical cooperation and capacity building, including data-collection, monitoring and early warning systems, at all levels. The General Assembly called for the continued and full implementation of its resolution 52/200, decided that the La Niña phenomenon would be considered in the context of the implementation of that resolution, and requested the Secretary-General, in consultation with the Administrative Committee on Coordination, to submit recommendations, through the Economic and Social Council, on how the United Nations system would deal with the reduction of natural disasters after the conclusion of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction in 1999, taking into account the lessons learned and making early warning as a key element for future strategies.

33. In its resolution 53/24 of 10 November 1998, entitled "International Year of Mountains", the General Assembly, recalling the relevant provisions of Agenda 21 on sustainable mountain development, proclaimed 2002 as the International Year of Mountains, and invited the Food and Agriculture

Organization to serve as the lead agency for the Year, in collaboration with, inter alia, UNEP. The General Assembly called upon Governments, national and international organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector to make voluntary contributions in accordance with the guidelines of the Economic and Social Council for international years and anniversaries and to lend other forms of support to the International Year of Mountains, and encouraged all Governments, the United Nations system and all other actors to take advantage of the International Year of Mountains in order to increase awareness of the importance of sustainable mountain development.

34. By its resolution 53/44 of 3 December 1998, entitled "Effects of atomic radiation", the Assembly decided to maintain the present functions and independent role of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, including present reporting arrangements, and requested UNEP to continue providing support for effective conduct of the work of the Scientific Committee and dissemination of its findings to the Assembly, the scientific community and the public.

35. By its resolution 53/180 of 15 December 1998, entitled "Special Session of the General Assembly for the overall and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda", the General Assembly decided that the special session will be held in June 2001 for three working days, and that the Commission on Human Settlements should serve as the preparatory committee, which shall be open-ended. The Assembly requested relevant organizations of the United Nations system and the funds and programmes, consistent with their respective mandates, to contribute, as appropriate, to the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda at the national, regional and global levels. The Secretary-General was requested to report to the Assembly at its fifty-fourth session on the implementation of the resolution.

36. By its resolution 53/1 H of 16 November 1998, entitled "International cooperation and coordination for the human and ecological rehabilitation and economic development of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan", the General Assembly invited, inter alia, entities of the international community to share their knowledge and experience in order to contribute to the human and ecological rehabilitation and economic development of the Semipalatinsk region, and invited relevant organs of the United Nations system to participate in the rehabilitation of the region. The Assembly invited the Secretary-General to pursue a consultative process with the participation of, inter alia, relevant United Nations agencies, on modalities for mobilizing the necessary support to seek appropriate solutions to the problems and needs of the region, including those prioritized in the Secretary-General's report (A/53/424), and further requested the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its fifty-fifth session on the implementation of the resolution.

37. By its resolution 53/191 of 15 December 1998, entitled "Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa", the General Assembly called upon all States and other actors to contribute to the successful outcome of the second session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, held at Dakar from 30 November to 11 December 1998, and called on all countries not parties to the Convention to ratify or accede to the Convention as soon as possible. The Assembly also noted that the United Nations, the Convention secretariat and the Government of Germany had signed

a headquarters agreement on 18 August 1998, noted with concern that the Global Mechanism had not begun operating on 1 January 1998, as indicated by the Conference of the Parties, and called upon the international community, including the United Nations system, to support the efforts of affected developing countries in the process of elaboration and implementation of action programmes to combat desertification including, as appropriate, interregional programmes and platforms of cooperation, by providing them with financial resources and other forms of assistance. The Secretary-General was requested to report to the Assembly at its fifty-fourth session on the outcome of the second session of the Conference of the Parties, as well as on measures for the implementation of decisions adopted by the Conference at that session.

38. By its resolution 53/189 of 15 December 1998, entitled "Implementation of the outcome of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island States", the General Assembly took note of the report of the Secretary-General on plans and projects for the sustainable development of small island developing States implemented, under implementation or envisaged for the period 1999-2003 by bilateral donors, United Nations organizations and regional and non-United Nations international organizations (A/53/358), and welcomed the action taken by small island developing States and the international donor community in implementing these projects and plans. The Assembly also took note of the report of the Secretary-General on the development of a vulnerability index for small island developing States (A/53/65-E/1998/5), urged that the progress made be continued and encouraged all the relevant organizations engaged in the process of refining the vulnerability index to work collaboratively. The Assembly further welcomed the actions taken by, inter alia, organizations of the United Nations system in support of activities relating to the outcome of the Global Conference for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, and urged the United Nations system to continue to assist small island developing States in preparations for the seventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the special session of the Assembly in September 1999 for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action. The Assembly reiterated the urgency of international community's support of the adaptation efforts of small island developing States to cope with the threat of sea-level rise experienced as a result of climate change. The Assembly also welcomed the activities undertaken by the Global Environment Facility and invited it to support further the objectives of the Barbados Programme of Action. The Secretary-General was requested to submit to the Assembly at its fifty-fifth session a report on actions taken to implement the resolution and the recommendations emanating from the special session for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action.

39. By its resolution 53/190 of 15 December 1998, entitled "Convention on Biological Diversity", the General Assembly welcomed the results of the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, held at Bratislava from 4 to 16 May 1998, and its decision on the adoption of the programmes of work and the thematic approach to guide its work in the development of the Convention for the foreseeable future, including its in-depth consideration of ecosystems. The Assembly also, inter alia, recognized the importance of the adoption of the protocol on biosafety at the extraordinary meeting of the Conference of the Parties in

1999, or as soon as possible thereafter. States that have not yet ratified the Convention were encouraged to do so as soon as possible. Recognizing the utility of information exchange, the Assembly encouraged the development of biodiversity information networks at the national, regional and international levels. The Executive Secretary of the Convention was invited to report to the Assembly on the ongoing work of the Convention.

40. By its resolution 53/7 of 16 October 1998, entitled "World Solar Programme 1996-2005", the General Assembly invited the Secretary-General, in consultation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and in close cooperation with UNEP and other relevant organizations to: undertake concrete action to ensure that the World Solar Programme is fully integrated and mainstreamed in the efforts of the United Nations system to attain the objective of sustainable development; bring the Programme to the attention of relevant funding and technical assistance sources and encourage them to consider contributing to its effective implementation; continue to sensitize and generate a greater degree of awareness to the strategic importance of the Programme for ensuring sustainable development; and submit to the Assembly at its fifty-fourth a report on measures taken by different entities of the United Nations system in accordance with the resolution.

41. By its resolution 53/200 of 15 December 1998, entitled "Proclamation of the year 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism", the General Assembly reaffirmed Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/40 of 30 July 1998 and proclaimed 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism.